

Message Text

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PAGE 01 GABORO 00895 011051Z
ACTION AF-10

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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1907
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY DARESSALAA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LUSAKA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 0895

CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV, SREF, RH, BC
SUBJECT: MASS ARRIVAL OF RHODESIAN STUDENTS IN BOTSWANA

REF: 77 GABORONE 354

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

1. OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT RELEASED FOLLOWING STATEMENT
MARCH 31 CONCERNING GOB HANDLING OF 432 RHODESIAN
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO CROSSED INTO BOTSWANA
FROM TEGWANI MISSION: BEGIN TEXT: AN OFFICIAL IN THE
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT TOLD RADIO BOTSWANA THIS MORNING
THAT 384 OF THE 432 STUDENTS FROM TEGWANI MISSION IN
RHODESIA WILL BE ASSISTED BACK TO RHODESIA TODAY.
THE OFFICIAL, MR. P. STEENKAMP, SAID A TOTAL OF
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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 GABORO 00895 011051Z

432 STUDENTS WERE FOUND AT RAMAQUABANE BY THE BOTSWANA
AUTHORITIES AND WERE LATER TAKEN TO FRANCISTOWN WHERE
THEY WERE QUESTIONED. AFTER THIS EXERCISE, 384 OF
THEM SAID THEY WANTED TO RETURN TO RHODESIA AND WILL
ACCORDINGLY BE RETURNED TODAY.

MR. STEENKAMP SAID THERE WERE NO FREEDOM FIGHTERS
FOUND IN BOTSWANA WHO COULD HAVE FORCED THE STUDENTS

INTO BOTSWANA AS HAS BEEN SUGGESTED BY THE RHODESIA REGIME OF IAN SMITH.

THE STUDENTS ARE UNDERSTOOD TO HAVE LEFT THE SCHOOL ON WEDNESDAY NIGHT AND CROSSED INTO BOTSWANA.

IN THE PAST MANY PEOPLE FROM RHODESIA HAVE CROSSED INTO BOTSWANA AND SOUGHT POLITICAL ASYLUM AND THE BOTSWANA GOVERNMENT HAS GRANTED SUCH ASYLUM ONLY TO THOSE WHO VOLUNTARILY ASKED FOR IT. END TEXT

END UNCLASSIFIED.

2. BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL: GOB MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND PUBLIC SERVICE KWELAGOBÉ AND NEWLY APPOINTED DIRECTOR OF INFORMATION SERVICES SETSHOGO (EX-HICOM IN LONDON) DISCUSSED ARRIVAL AND HANDLING OF STUDENTS WITH EMBOFFS AT SOCIAL OCCASION EVENING MARCH 30. BOTH KWELAGOBÉ AND SETSHOGO FIRST HEARD OF INCIDENT FROM BBC BROADCASTS BUT LEARNED MORE DETAILS IN COURSE OF EVENING THROUGH TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS WITH GOB SECRETARY TO CABINET STEENKAMP. KWELAGOBÉ TOLD US THAT GOB WOULD FOLLOW GENERAL POLICY USED IN ALL RHODESIAN REFUGEE CASES, THAT IS THOSE WHO ASKED FOR ASYLUM WOULD BE GRANTED IT WHILE THOSE WHO WISHED TO RETURN WOULD BE PERMITTED TO DO SO.

3. HOWEVER, GOB HANDLING OF STUDENTS DIFFERS
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 GABORO 00895 011051Z

IN SOME WAYS FROM PROCEDURES USED WHEN STUDENTS FROM MANAMA SCHOOL CROSSED INTO BOTSWANA IN FEBRUARY 1977 (REFTEL). IN THAT INSTANCE, GOB ALLOWED PARENTS TO COME TO FRANCISTOWN AND PERSONALLY ATTEMPT TO CONVINCE THEIR CHILDREN TO RETURN TO RHODESIA; IN CURRENT CASE INTERVIEWS WERE CONDUCTED BY BOTSWANA POLICE. IN MANAMA INCIDENT, GOB SENT PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARY TIBONE TO FRANCISTOWN TO SUPERVISE HANDLING OF THE INCIDENT; THIS TIME INTERVIEWS AND ALL LOCAL ARRANGEMENTS ARE IN THE HANDS OF FRANCISTOWN DISTRICT COMMISSIONER MASALLILA.

4. KWELAGOBÉ AND SETSHOGO APPEARED SURPRISED BY THE LARGE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO ELECTED TO RETURN TO RHODESIA. NOTING REPORTS THAT MOST OF THE STUDENTS ARE SHONAS, KWELAGOBÉ SPECULATED THAT THEY DECIDED TO RETURN RATHER THAN TRANSIT BOTSWANA TO ZAMBIAN CAMPS RUN BY NDEBELE-DOMINATED ZAPU.

5. FROM PUBLIC RELATIONS AND INFORMATION VIEWPOINT, BOTH KWELAGOBÉ AND SETSHOGO EXPECTED THAT WESTERN

MEDIA REPORTING OF INCIDENT WOULD BE BIASED AGAINST BOTSWANA. THEY CLAIMED THAT RHODISAN ARE EXPERIENCED AND ADEPT AT HANDLING MEDIA WHILE BOTSWANA'S PUBLIC RELATIONS EFFORTS ARE USUALLY UNSUCCESSFUL. KWELAGOB RECALLED WITH SOME BITTERNESS "BIASED" REPORTING BY WESTERN CORRESPONDENTS OF MANAMA INCIDENT, PARTICULARLY MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE UNWELCOME INTERVENTION IN INCIDENT BY OUTSIDE PERSONALITIES SUCH AS CANON BURGESS CARR AND ICRC REP FROM SALISBURY. WITH REGARD TO CURRENT INCIDENT, KWELAGOB AND SETSHOGO BELIEVE THAT RHODESIAN ALLEGATIONS THAT CHILDREN WERE KIDNAPPED WILL BE EMPHASIZED IN PRESS REPORTS WHILE GOB'S ACTION IN ALLOWING MOST OF THEM TO VOLUNTARILY RETURN TO THEIR HOMES IN RHODESIA WILL GO UNNOTICED.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 GABORO 00895 011051Z

6. COMMENT: GOB DECISION TO EXPEDITE HANDLING OF INCIDENT REFLECTS DESIRE TO AVOID POSSIBLY UNFAVORABLE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE TYPE WHICH FOLLOWED MANAMA INCIDENT AS WELL AS UNSOLICITED INVOLVEMENT BY OUTSIDERS. IN PARTICULAR, GOB HAS DECIDED TO AVOID PARENTAL INTERVIEWS WITH CHILDREN WHICH LED TO EMOTIONAL CHARGES AND COUNTERCHARGES IN WAKE OF MANAMA INCIDENT. DESPITE GOB'S BEST EFFORTS TO QUICKLY AND FAIRLY RESOLVE INCIDENT, KWELAGOB IS PROBABLY CORRECT THAT REPORTING OF BOTSWANA'S HUMANE HANDLING OF STUDENTS WILL BE OVERWHELMED BY RHODESIAN AND SOUTH AFRICAN REPORTS THAT STUDENTS WERE ABDUCTED AND FORCED TO ENTER BOTSWANA.

7. DECISION BY MOST OF THE STUDENTS TO RETURN HOME CONTRASTS SHARPLY WITH MANAMA INCIDENT IN WHICH ONLY A FEW STUDENTS ELECTED TO RETURN TO RHODESIA. STUDENTS' DESIRE TO GO HOME SUGGESTS THAT THEY MAY WELL HAVE BEEN FORCED BY GUERRILLAS, PRESUMABLY ZAPU, TO LEAVE THEIR SCHOOL AND TREK THROUGH THE BUSH TO THE BORDER. ONCE INSIDE BOTSWANA AND UNDER PROTECTION OF BOTSWANA AUTHORITIES, MOST STUDENTS OBVIOUSLY CHOSE NOT TO ENTER CAMPS, POSSIBLY BECAUSE OF APPREHENSION THAT THEY WOULD BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST BY NDEBELES IN CAMPS OR IN ZAMBIA. THIS POSSIBLE SCENARIO DOES NOT EXPLAIN WHY ZAPU GUERRILLAS WOULD ROUND UP A GROUP OF SHONA STUDENTS AND FORCE THEM TO CROSS BORDER INTO BOTSWANA. MOREOVER, IT DOES NOT ACCOUNT FOR SAFE PASSAGE OF A LARGE AND PRESUMABLY NOISY GROUP OF STUDENTS THROUGH WAR ZONE WHERE MUCH SMALLER GROUPS HAVE BEEN AMBUSHED OR APPREHENDED BY RHODESIAN SECURITY FORCES. IN ANY EVENT, GOB AUTHORITIES HAVE AGAIN DEMONSTRATED TRADITIONAL TOLERANCE AND WILLINGNESS TO PERMIT REFUGEES

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PAGE 05 GABORO 00895 011051Z

FREEDOM OF CHOICE.
NORLAND

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